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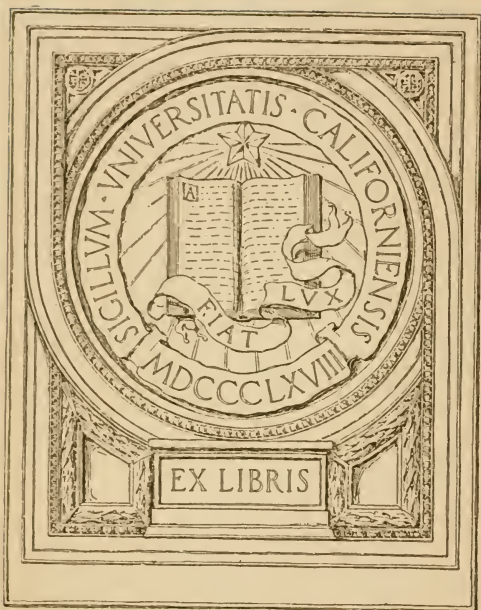
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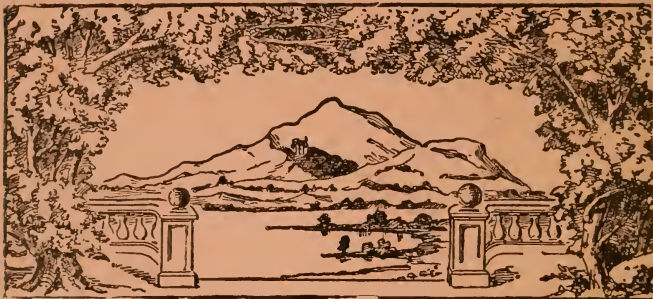
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HESTER'S MYSTERY:

A Comedy in One Act.

BY

ARTHUR W. PINERO.

LONDON:
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NEW YORK:
SAMUEL FRENCH,
PUBLISHERS,
24, WEST 22ND STREET.

Produced at Folly Theatre, London, June 5th, 1890.

CHARACTERS

Mr. Owen Silverdale (of Silverdale's
Academy for Young Ladies) - Mr. H. WESTLAND.
John Royle - - - - - Mr. J. CARNE.
Joel (a farm labourer) - - - - - Mr. G. SHELTON.
Nance Butterworth (a widow)- - Miss ELIZA JOHNSTONE.
Hester (her daughter) - - - - Miss EFFIE LISTON.

SCENE.—The Dairy and Stable-yard of Nance Butterworth's Farm.

TIME.—THE PRESENT.

Time in Representation, Fifty Minutes.

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HESTER'S MYSTERY.

SCENE. — *The dairy and stable-yard of NANCE BUTTERWORTH'S farm. On the R. the exterior of the stable, with a half-door leading into it. Below the door, down stage, a stack of straw and some straw litter. Above the door a three-legged stool. In the centre of stage a small pump, with the handle towards the R. Against the pump a basket, bottom upwards, covered with a horse-cloth. On the L. an open shed, under which are some wooden benches, with butter-tubs on them. Milk cans, &c., standing about. At the further end of the shed, a small door, leading to interior of dairy. Down stage, L., outside the shed, a small table and stool. On the table is a scrubbing-brush, and under it an iron pail. Openings up the stage, R. and L., with hedgerow and meadow, and view of distant country at back. The whole scene to be quaint and old-fashioned, and as bright as possible.*

At rise of curtain JOEL is discovered asleep on stool up R. JOEL is an old farm labourer, with straggling grey hair and a withered face, wears a dirty smock-frock, worsted stockings, and very large heavy boots. JOHN ROYLE enters from up the stage, L., carrying some harness over his shoulders. He is a fine, strapping young fellow, wearing no coat, a very white shirt, breeches, and leather gaiters. He crosses over to stable and sees JOEL.

JOHN. (*shaking JOEL*) Joel !

JOEL. (*who speaks in a country dialect, in a high treble key*) Oy, I'm here.

JOHN. Rouse yourself, man ; you are always sleeping (*music ceases*) about the place, like a cat in the sun. Mrs. Butterworth will send a milk-pail at your head if she catches you.

JOEL. (*rising*) I don't care for that. The missus's tongue is harder nor any milk-pail I ever came across.

JOHN. (*crossing to stable-door*) Well, get to work, man, get to work. You know well enough that the mistress's daughter is coming home from school to-day, and everything is to be made as neat as a new pin.

JOEL. I'm not a goin' to do another stroke till I've had a glass o' yale. I'm nigh perishin' for a glass o' yale.

JOHN. I'm ashamed of you.

JOEL. You'd best be a bit ashamed of yourself while you're at it. I've been on Butterworth's farm for nigh seventeen

year, and you've been here less nor a week. When you've had seventeen year of Nance Butterworth's tongue you'll be dommed glad of a glass o' yale. So get into the stable and do your work ; you're a new hand on the farm, and I'm not proud o' your acquaintance.

JOHN. Thank you for nothing, Joel. (*goes into stable, R. JOEL comes down*)

JOEL. Bits o' boys ! I ain't no patience with 'em. That lad thinks too much o' keepin' his shirt sleeves clean. (*sits on basket, C.*) Work and dirt always go alongside, I say. There's not a farm labourer for ten mile round as dirty as I am. (*closing his eyes*) But I should like to wash myself out with a glass o' yale. (*puts his head against pump and dozes*)

NANCE BUTTERWORTH *enters up stage, L., carrying a wooden pail under her arm. She is a tidy-looking woman of about forty, dressed in a neat print dress coming down to her ankles, and showing a clumsy pair of hob-nailed boots. She wears a bib-apron, and her sleeves are turned up over her elbows. Her manner is sour and harsh. She comes down to table and puts her pail upon it.*

NANCE. (*seeing JOEL sleeping*) Bless my soul and body ! There's that lazy hunks dozing again. (*takes scrubbing-brush from table and throws it at JOEL*) Get up, you lazy vagabond ! (*JOEL rises*) Where's my scrubbing-brush ?

JOEL. On my chest, missus. (*returning it to her*)

NANCE. What do you mean by sleeping about the yard till the very pigs blush at you ? You rob a poor widow by taking her money and eating her victual. and all you do for it is to gape at her with a mouth for all the world like the poor-box at the church yonder. I'll let 'em know what an idle thief you are, for ten mile round.

JOEL. Ay, your tongue 'll reach that far without your stirrin' to tell 'em.

NANCE. (*raising her pail threateningly*) What !

JOEL. I'll not deceive ye ; I'm well-nigh dyin' for a glass o' yale.

NANCE. You'll die before you get it out of me. Do you know what to-day is ?

JOEL. Ay, it's a Friday.

NANCE. And do you know who's coming back to the farm this very day, after being away ever so many long months ?

JOEL. Ay, I know.

NANCE. My baby, my daughter Hester, that you're not fit to live in the same world with.

JOEL. Well, I came into the world afore her, so that's her look out. First come, first served, is my motter.

NANCE. And on a day like this you think of nothing but ale swilling. You're not a man.

JOEL. Yes I am, and I've been one for fifty year or more.

NANCE (*advancing to him*) Your heart's made of pewter, and your blood's made of beer, and your brains are nothing but hops. So get out of my sight, or the air will be tainted with you, and not fit for my baby to breathe. (JOHN *appears at the stable-door*)

JOEL. (*going up the stage, L.*) Well, if your daughter takes after her mother, there'll be a tidy bit of conversation goin' on hereabouts.

JOHN. Get out, Joel. Do what you have to do, and don't be rude.

NANCE. You mind your own business, John Royle. (*to JOEL*) Joel, you've to go to the railway to fetch up my baby and her boxes, so keep your eye on the clock, for it's near the hour now.

JOEL. Ay, I'll keep my eye on the clock, I'm dead on that job. (*slouches off, up L.*)

NANCE. I was well-nigh losing my temper with the vagabond. (*she takes iron pail from under table and goes to pump, JOHN steps forward and works the handle for her*) You're very polite, young man—a deal too polite for a good workman. (*she takes the iron pail to table, and commences to scrub the wooden pail vigorously*)

JOHN. Don't say that, Mrs. Butterworth; I hope I shall please you in the long run. I'm a new hand on a farm.

NANCE. Ay, and you're a bit of a mystery to me. You're the first man I ever took without a character; where you came from, Heaven above knows; but I'll give the devil his due, you've been in my house four days and you haven't stole anything as yet.

JOHN. No, not even a kind word from you.

NANCE. Eh? Don't you be too quick, young man. A sharp tongue is an edged tool, and makes ugly scratches.

JOHN. (R.) Ay, you're right there. (*advancing*) Shall I do your scrubbing for you?

NANCE. (L.) Nay, not you—you'll soil your hands. (JOHN *looks at his hands*) They're white enough still, don't fret yourself. (JOHN *seats himself by the pump, takes out a short, ready-loaded clay pipe, lights it, and smokes complacently*) I guess you were a clerk, or a writer, or a nothing at all, before you came to this part of the country, eh?

JOHN. (*puffing the smoke*) May be.

NANCE (*inquisitively*) You've not worked with your hands, that's clear.

JOHN. Perhaps not.

NANCE. And like enough you're head's not over strong.

JOHN. Like enough.

NANCE. Perhaps you got into some scrape that drove you out of your own part of the country.

JOHN. Perhaps so.

NANCE. A clean scrape or a dirty one, who knows?

JOHN. Ay, who knows?

NANCE. (*angry at his coolness*) What brought you into this country?

JOHN. Looking for work.

NANCE. It's not many farmers that would take a man without knowing his story.

JOHN. That's true.

NANCE. (*loudly*) What led you to my farm?

JOHN (*rising coolly*) They told me you had such a hard heart, and a bitter tongue, that you were glad enough to find a stranger who would work for you.

NANCE. (*dropping her scrubbing-brush*) Did they?

JOHN. Ay, they did.

NANCE (*going towards him*) Well, you don't call *that* working, do you? smoking a beastly clay pipe, as black as your own history, may be. Haven't you a job to do?

JOHN (*angrily*) I'm mending some harness, but I haven't finished it.

NANCE. Why don't you finish it?

JOHN (*loudly*) Because my back aches.

NANCE (*sneeringly*) Your back aches! Your back is broad and big enough.

JOHN. Well, the bigger the back the more there is of it to ache. There, I beg your pardon for losing my temper. (*going to the stable-door*) Shall I put the trap to, to bring your daughter up from the station?

NANCE. No, she'll walk, and Joel will lift her boxes.

JOHN. But she has travelled a long distance, and may be tired.

NANCE. Look here; I want no hints from you, or any like you. My daughter is my private business. She's not part of the farm for you, or any man or woman on the farm, to bother your head about. My baby is all I have left in the world that is precious, and I don't allow a soul to meddle between me and her. (*JOEL enters at back from L.*)

JOEL. I've been keepin' my eye on the clock, and the train'll be in in a quarter of an hour.

JOHN. Shall I go with Joel, then, and lend him a hand with the boxes?

NANCE. No.

JOHN. Supposing they are too heavy for him to carry?

NANCE. Then he'll drop 'em. You finish your job.

JOHN. (*going into stable*) Do as you please.

NANCE. Do as you're told. (*Exit JOHN into stable. NANCE takes up the pail she has been scrubbing; to JOEL*) You get down to the station as fast as your legs can take you.

JOEL. Without so much as a drop o' yale?

NANCE. (*going up to the dairy door under the shed, L.*) If you're dry, you can have a basin of skim milk; you can water it—there's the pump. (*Exit, carrying wooden pail into dairy, R.*)

JOEL. Well, if there is a class of man that's put on, and downtrod, it's the agricultural labourer. (*going off towards L.*) Lor! here's a suit of black coming through the gate, as much like old Mother Chorley's raven as anything I ever saw. Why, it looks like a parson. If he preaches to me I'll hit him over the head wi' a rake.

MR. OWEN SILVERDALE *enters up stage, R. He is a young man, dressed in a clerical style, neatly in black, and is sleek in appearance and meek in manner. He wears an eye-glass, and carries a book under his arm, and a small umbrella in his hand; his manner is affectedly bland.*

SIL. (*to JOEL*) I say, my man, is this Butterworth's farm?

JOEL. Ay, this is Butterworth's farm.

SIL. Is it really? Is Miss Hester at home?

JOEL. No, she ain't.

SIL. Isn't she, really? When can I see her?

JOEL. Well, as a general rule, when you take that glass out of your eye, I should think. I tell you she ain't at home.

SIL. Where is Mrs. Butterworth?

JOEL. In the dairy.

SIL. Really. Um—will you fetch her?

JOEL. No, I'm dommed if I will! I've got a job that I'm dead on, so good-morning. (*goes up to R., and then turns round to SILVERDALE*) I say, Mr. Pastor, are you a tee-totaller?

SIL. No.

JOEL. No more aint I.

SIL. Aren't you really?

JOEL. Now look here; I'll not deceive you, I'm droppin for a glass o' yale. Now you've hindered me in a job that I'm dead on, and I feel mortally inclined to drink your health. (*coming down, R.C.*)

SIL. (*L.C.*) Really; kindly hold that (*gives book to JOEL*) and that. (*gives umbrella*) I will search for a skilling.

JOEL. (*R.C.*) Thankee.

SIL. (*producing a shilling, and holding it up for JOEL'S inspection*) I have found one. (*taking umbrella and book from JOEL*) Thank you so much. I understand that you are in need of a little refreshment. My friend, had you been very civil I would have bestowed upon you a small donation, but you have behaved so excessively rudely, that I would not give you a twelfth part of this shilling though your bucolic existence depended on the act. (*returning shilling to pocket*) Must you really go? (*JOEL looks at him in blank astonishment and indignation, and then walks off up stage, R.*)

SIL. (*looking round*) Now, where is Hester's mother, I wonder. (*going to stable-door and knocking*) Is any one here? (*JOHN appears at the door*)

JOHN. Can I do anything for you?

SIL. You really can. I want to see Mrs. Butterworth.

JOHN. (*pointing to dairy-door*) I think you'll find her in the dairy yonder. I'm busy myself, if you'll excuse me. (*retires into stable*)

SIL. Thank you very much. (*thoughtfully looking in the direction of JOHN*) Dear me, I fancy I've seen that face! How strange! Where could it have been? (*NANCE comes out of dairy, meeting SILVERDALE*)

NANCE. (L.) Hullo! Who are you, and what do you want?

SIL. (R.) I think I have the pleasure of addressing Mrs. Butterworth?

NANCE. I'm Nance Butterworth, and you are on my premises.

SIL. Really. My name is Silverdale—Owen Silverdale. My sister Martha and I are the principals of Silverdale's Academy for Young Ladies, at Shrewsbury, at which your daughter Hester has been a promising pupil for the last three years. I may consider myself a friend of your daughter's. (*gushingly holding out his hand*) How are you?

NANCE. (*putting her hands behind her*) Your bill is paid, isn't it? Or do you want to leave a tract, or something?

SIL. Not at all. I have lately had occasion to distribute the prizes at our academy. (*holding up book*) Now, your daughter left school rather suddenly, without availing herself of a little reward of merit, a small volume of domestic poems—a prize for good conduct. Finding myself in this part of the country, I have given myself the pleasure of placing it in her hands.

NANCE. It's a pity you bothered yourself.

SIL. Not at all. I am, I may say, a little attached to your daughter.

NANCE. Eh ?

SIL. As the phrase goes, I have a sneaking kindness for Hester.

NANCE. Aye, I'll be bound it's a sneaking one.

SIL. You are really a little harsh. Mrs. Butterworth, I am a bachelor.

NANCE. So I should hope, and if you've any charity and goodwill towards poor creatures of my sex you'll remain so.

SIL. (R. C.) Really, I think I should make a fairly good husband.

NANCE. (*advancing towards him*) Stop a bit. I don't know that I quite see your drift. What is it

SIL. (R. C.) My dear Mrs. Butterworth, your open-hearted candour is quite refreshing ; I am exceedingly fond of your daughter.

NANCE. (C.) Now I understand you. You say my plain talk is refreshing ; if so, you shall have a regular feast of it. Look you here, Mr. Silvertongue, or whatever your name is, my daughter is all that is left to me out of a hard, bitter life. I know what marriage is—I've had a wretched experience of it with a drunken, cruel husband ; and I mean to spare my Hester the same fate, or any chance of it. She's my baby ; these are the only arms she shall ever fly to, and she shall remain my baby till her mother's put under the ground !

SIL. You really say so ! Dear me !

NANCE. Aye, I really say so. As for that rubbishing book, you can give it to her if you like, and then you can pack off about your business, or mayhap you'll find your head in the bee-hive. (*going up stage*)

SIL. Thank you very much. Is Hester at home ?

NANCE. Lor, man, how should she be ? But we're expecting her by the mid-day train, and so you won't have long to wait, you know. She left her school only yesterday, and its a weary journey from Shrewsbury, they tell me—a hundred and fifty mile, or more.

SIL. (*astonished*) Left school only yesterday ! Do you really say so ?

NANCE. Aye, left school only yesterday ! Is there anything strange in that, that you stand there staring like a puppy with its eyes new opened ?

SIL. Left school only yesterday ! Um !

NANCE. Well, talking to you isn't scrubbing the dairy bricks. You can take a walk over the farm. You'll find the pigs at the bottom of the kitchen ground ; they ought to be glad to see you ! (*goes into dairy, L*)

SIL. (*puzzled*) Left school only yesterday. Really, not ! But I happen to know that Hester quitted the academy

exactly six weeks ago. Um! How strange! What has Hester been doing for the last six weeks, eh? I don't think my shrewish friend, the female farmer, is quite as cute as she thinks herself. I'll take a little stroll. (*as he is going off up L.* JOHN appears, leaning over the stable-door, and calls to him)

JOHN. I beg your pardon. Do you carry a watch?

SIL. (L. B., turning round) I really think I do. (*referring to his watch*) It is a quarter to one.

JOHN. Thank you. (*to himself*) Joel should be back from the station now. (*retires into the stable*)

SIL. Bless me! Where have I seen that face? Somewhere, I am sure. The odour of mystery mingles with the perfume of hay upon Butterworth's farm. Hester, unknown to her pleasant, sweet-tempered mother, leaves school six weeks ago, and returns to her home to-day. There are six weeks to be accounted for, Miss Hester, and to me. Six weeks—bless me! What a great deal of mischief can be done in six weeks! (*looking at the book he carries*) A prize for good conduct. Good conduct, eh? Um! Really, now! (*goes off up L., pondering.* JOEL appears up stage from R., struggling under the weight of a heavy box, and carrying also a band-box and parcel. He places the luggage on the ground up stage, C.)

JOEL. (*wiping his forehead*) This is the driest job I've ever put my hand to. Howsomever, there's the baggage, but I'm blest if I know where the gal is. (*goes to dairy-door and calls*) I say, missus! (NANCE comes out)

NANCE. Well, where's the child?

JOEL. I'm mortally durned if I know. The train had been in the station ten minutes, or more, when I got there, and there was nothing on the platform but that there luggage.

NANCE. Why, you fool, you were late!

JOEL. You're right there, missus, but I'll not deceive ye, I was well nigh dried up for a glass o' yale, so I just dropped in to the Pig and Herrin'.

HESTER runs on from up stage, R. She is a very pretty girl, dressed in a neat travelling dress, with a straw hat and little cape. She carries a travelling bag.

HES. Here I am, mother! Did you think you had lost me? (*she goes to NANCE, who puts her arms fondly round her, and kisses her*)

NANCE. Ah, my baby!

JOEL. (*coming down, R.*) I went down to the station to fetch you, Miss Hesty, but the train come in a bit too early and missed me.

HES. (*kissing JOEL*) All right, Joel, how are you? (*giving him the travelling bag*) Take that bag, Joel, it's full of pretty presents for everybody. (*JOEL takes bag, goes up stage, and sits on box at back*)

NANCE. (*putting her hand on HESTER's shoulders and looking at her*) Ah, baby, baby, you're too smart and gaudy for the life you have to lead. You are a woman now, Hester, and no longer a school-girl; and a woman is of little use in this farm till she can turn her sleeves over her elbows and do a man's work, for half a man's pay.

HES. And I'll do that, mother, and I'll never tire at my work, rough or easy.

NANCE. (L. C.) It's all rough, baby, for such as we are. The world is a pool, my child, in which the poor folks struggle and splash, and eat each other for subsistence, like the fishes do. The surface of the pool is frozen over into a sheet of clear, smooth ice for the rich to skate on, and the great folks glide about over the heads of the poor without a fall or a stumble. ☉

HES (C.) Great folks have their miseries too, sometimes—just as the squire's daughter broke through the ice at the mill-pond last winter, and got a ducking.

NANCE. That was because she had a man's arm round her waist, and the ice wouldn't bear the two. Never have a man's arm round you, Hester, and you'll come to no mischief. So off with your fineries, child, and say good-bye to your lady's life.

HES. (*taking off her hat and cloak*) I hate an easy life, mother. (*she dresses up the pump with her hat and cloak*) There, that is all that is left of Hester, the fine lady, and now I am nothing but your little farm girl, mother dear, and don't wish to be anything better. Look, I shake hands with the fine lady, and regret that pressure of circumstances renders it necessary that we should terminate our acquaintance. (*she shakes the pump-handle warmly*)

NANCE. (L.) That is like my baby. But take off those wretched gloves, for I hate the sight of them. (*HESTER takes off her gloves*) Your mother never wore gloves, nor your grandmother before her.

HES. Come and sit down, mother. (*NANCE takes stool from L., and, in doing so, turns her back upon HESTER for a moment. HESTER has taken off her gloves, and suddenly looks at her left hand; aside*) Oh, my wedding ring.

NANCE. (*half turning*) What's the matter, baby? (*HESTER snatches the ring from her hand, and impulsively flings it through the opened stable door*)

HES. Nothing, mother. I've torn my glove, that's all.

NANCE. And no loss neither. (HESTER sits on the basket, c., NANCE on stool by her left)

HES. Now, Joel, empty the lucky bag of the pretty presents. (JOEL comes down, bringing the stool from up the stage, R., sits and opens bag) Dip your hand in, Joel. "Here's a pretty thing, and a very pretty thing, and who's the owner of this pretty thing?" (JOEL dips his hand in the bag, and pulls out a baby's woollen shoe, tied up with blue ribbon; aside) Oh!

NANCE. What's that, Joel?

HES. (taking it from JOEL) It's a—it's a—purse, mother, a new style, something like a baby's shoe. You see, you put the money in there, and then tie it up with a blue ribbon. I—I—think I'll unpack the bag, Joel. (slips the shoe into the bosom of her dress)

JOEL. Nay, nay, it's a job that I'm dead on. (takes out a book and hands it to HESTER)

HES. It's a Church Service for you, mother. (giving it her) There.

NANCE. Thank you, my dear; though it's a sore pity the edges are gilt—the words are bright enough, and don't want no gilding. (turning over the leaves) You've been reading it, Hester, like a good girl; here's a leaf turned down.

HES. Oh, yes; I was looking at it in the train.

NANCE. (sternly) Hester, my girl? (rises)

HES. Yes, mother.

NANCE. Do you know you have turned down a leaf at the Marriage Service?

HES. Lor, mother! have I?

NANCE. Don't study that, my girl; for it's the only part of the book that's dangerous for the unwary. They call it a Marriage Service; for me it was a marriage slavery. (sits)

HES. (timidly) But some people are happy when they are married.

NANCE. They wear smiling faces, because they're ashamed to own their bad bargain, just as a fish swims about for years and years with an old hook in his gullet. He may blink, and gulp, and flap his tail, but the hook's in his inside all the time, and he never forgets the bright summer's morning when he swallowed it. I swallowed your father, my dear, and an uncomfortable sort of a dose he was.

HES. What did he do, mother?

NANCE. Why, he drank beer and knocked down skittles half his time, and drank more beer and knocked down his wife the other half. But he's dead and gone, and I mustn't say a word against him; but if ever there was a brute out of a sty or a kennel, he was one! (shutting up the book)

sharply) There, thank you for the gift, my pet, and we won't look at the Marriage Service any more. (*puts book in her pocket ; rises*)

HES. (C.) Now, Joel, what else have you in the bag?

JOEL. (R.) I'll see, Miss Hesty. (*he dips his hand in the bag, and produces an infant's feeding-bottle ; the bottle has no tube, and is in the shape of a flask*)

NANCE (L. C.) Good gracious ! What's that ?

HES. (*aghast*) That !

JOEL. Bless my soul, it's as much like a babby's bottle as anything I ever see !

HES. That, oh, that's my travelling flask for a long journey. It holds brandy——

JOEL. Pale brandy, I should say.

HES. Or sherry, or milk, or anything refreshing. (JOEL *puts it to his lips*)

JOEL. (*with a wry face*) Well, all I know is, it's mighty weak refreshment.

HES. Put it back, Joel, what is next? (JOEL *produces a huge pair of slippers*) Those are for you, Joel, to wear after your work is over. I don't know whether they are your size, but they will stretch.

JOEL. Much obliged, Miss Hesty, I'll wet them there shoes this very arternoon with a glass o' yale.

HES. What is next? (JOEL *takes out a pipe-case, and holds it up*) That is a pipe for Jem Landon, the stable-lad.

NANCE. In the first place, Jem Landon never smoked. In the second, I turned him neck and crop off the farm four days ago for being saucy.

HES. It will do for the man in his place. Is there a man in the stable?

NANCE (*calling*) John ! John Royle ! (JOHN *appears at stable door*)

JOHN. Aye, I'm here.

NANCE. This is my daughter Hester, and she has brought a present for a man that's gone. You can have it, if you don't care for another man's leavings. (*taking hat and cape off pump. JOHN comes out of stable and holds out his hand for the pipe*)

JOHN. Yes, I'll have it.

HES. (*kindly to JOHN*) Mother's kind, and doesn't mean to be hard, John. There's the pipe, with my best wishes.

JOHN. (*taking the pipe*) Thank you, Miss Hester, when I smoke it I'll think of you.

NANCE. And now, you two men, get that box into the house, and up the stair. Hester, you must be dying for some victuals? (*going up stage towards L.*)

HES. I'd rather wait, mother; I want to look at the horses. Send John back to show me over the stables.

NANCE. Very well. Come along, men. (*NANCE goes off up, L., followed by JOEL and JOHN, with the boxes, &c.*)

HES. (*after watching them off*) Thank Heaven, for a moment's relief! (*takes shoe out and kisses it earnestly*) Where is my memory? How imprudent I am! Dear little shoe! What a pity it is that I should have to tell such great big fibs about such a soft, innocent little woollen thing as you! And now, where is my wedding ring? I must hide it in some secure place. (*looking round*) My poor, dear wedding ring—I am so sorry—where could I have thrown you? I remember—in the stable. Oh, supposing a horse has swallowed it—how married he'll feel! (*she opens stable door, and goes into stable, closing door after her.* MR. OWEN SILVERDALE appears at the back, from L.)

SIL. The vision of a travelling trunk and a band box, leads me to suspect that the prodigal has returned. Dear girl, I quite long to see her.

HES. (*sobbing in the stable*) Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What shall I do?

SIL. (*listening*) Really! that sounds like a woman in tears. A long association with an academy for young ladies renders sound quite familiar to me. (*HESTER comes out of the stable, crying. She does not see SILVERDALE, who is up the stage*)

HES. Oh, dear me, I can't find it, and I'm a most miserable girl! Why did I throw it away? (*with her handkerchief to her eyes—leaning on stable door*) Oh! my pretty ring—my pretty ring. (*SILVERDALE comes quietly down*)

SIL. (*softly*) Hester, dear. (*touches her with umbrella.* HESTER turns, and confronts him with dismay)

HES. (*frightened*) Oh! Mr. Silverdale!

SIL. (*holding up his hand gushingly*) How are you?

HES. (*sobbing*) I'm very—I'm very—I'm not at all well.

SIL. (*taking her hand*) My poor little sweetheart.

HES. (*releasing her hand*) Mr. Silverdale, what are you doing at our farm? Have you seen mother?

SIL. Yes, a few minutes ago. A charming woman, your mother; really charming, so honestly outspoken, and with such an absorbing trust in you, it quite seems to have swallowed up her faith in other people.

HES. (*coming down, R. C., nervously*) I hope my school-fellows are quite well, Mr. Silverdale.

SIL. Quite well.

HES. Mary Manders had measles when I left. Is she better?

SIL. Much better. I really thought at one time that she

had transferred the ailment to me, which would have been unfortunate. I have never had the measles.

HES. Indeed, Mr. Silverdale.

SIL. No ; have you ?

HES. (*absently*) Eh ?

SIL. Have you ?

HES. Have I what, Mr. Silverdale ?

SIL. Had them.

HES. Had which, Mr. Silverdale ?

SIL. The measles.

HES. (*with a burst*) Oh, Mr. Silverdale, what brings you here ?

SIL. Principally to see you.

HES. Oh, no !

SIL. Really. Why be astonished ? You know how fond I have been of you for months and months. And I am such a faithful man. Where I love I stick like a plaster, for better or for worse.

HES. Oh, go away from this place, please, Mr. Silverdale. I have told you, often and often, that I don't like you—that I won't like you—and that I can't be bothered with you. I'm not a flirt.

SIL. No. If I thought so I could not reconcile it to my conscience to pay my addresses to you. (*pointing to stool, R.C.*) Sit down ; you must be so tired.

HES. No, I'm not tired.

SIL. Yes, you are ; you have come a long journey.

HES. (*falteringly*) No, I've—have only been a little distance—to visit a friend.

SIL. Really ? I think you are making a mistake, my dear. Your mother tells me you have just arrived from Shrewsbury.

HES. (*faintly*) Oh ! (*she sits, helplessly*)

SIL. (*coming close to her and looking down upon her*) When you left school, my dear Hester, six weeks ago——

HES. Oh dear, oh dear !

SIL. Six weeks ago, you quitted the Academy very suddenly, and before the expiration of the term, to visit your mother, who, you stated, was unwell. So hastily did you leave us, that you robbed me of my privilege of presenting to you on the day following, a little prize (*holding out book*), a volume of sweet domestic poems— a prize for good conduct.

HES. Well, Mr. Silverdale ?

SIL. To bring to you this little book is one of the objects of my visit.

HES. (*starting up*) Oh, give it to me, and go away, please !

SIL. So I will, dear Hester, when you prove to one of the principals of our establishment that this reward of merit has not been forfeited. So I will, when you have accounted to me for your actions during the last six weeks. (HESTER sits again, *hopelessly*)

HES. (R.) I can't, it is no business of yours, and every man should mind his own business.

SIL. It is my business, because I like you so much, and I want to know how it is that a young girl I am fond of leaves school unknown to her mother, six weeks ago, and only arrives home to-day.

HES. If you like me, why do you harass me so?

SIL. Because you won't love me in return. You always were an obstinate girl, Hester, and I mean to break you. Be kind to me! say one pretty word to me, and you can bury the last six weeks, and make your mother innocently walk over their grave. But if you refuse me this favour, I'll split upon you; I'll show your pleasant voiced, soft-hearted mother that you have been deceiving her; and I'll turn every blade of grass in that meadow into a lash for your pretty little shoulders. Do you hear? I'll love you if you'll let me; and I'll plague you if you won't.

HES. (*rising and looking at him*) You know I won't love you. How could any woman, in her senses, love a mean little man like you?

SIL. So I really am a mean little man, eh? Very well, I'll fetch your dear mother. (*he is going; she follows him*)

HES. Oh! I didn't mean to make you angry! Don't split upon me, Mr. Silverdale—don't split upon me!

SIL. Oh, I can split upon you, then, can I?

HES. Yes, I confess I am deceiving mother for a little while—only for a little while. I did leave the Academy six weeks ago, and I have only come home to-day; but don't tell tales out of school—don't you do a thing that every girl in my class would have cut their tongue out rather than be guilty of!

SIL. (L.C.) I'll not tell tales if you'll be friends with me—that's all I want, Hester.

HES. (R.C., *taking his hand*) Oh, thank you, dear Mr. Silverdale, thank you!

SIL. Loving you, Hester, is really my only fault—so kiss and make it up.

HES. Kiss and make it up?

SIL. Yes; we've had a bit of a row, dear, haven't we? Kiss and make it up.

HES. (*pointing to the book in SILVERDALE'S hand*) Oh, I see, you want to rob me of my prize for good conduct, and

put it on your own shelf. (*rousing herself*) Look here, I once boxed your ears at Shrewsbury. (*SILVERDALE raises his hand to his ear*) Yes, you remember it, that's the side. If you ask me to kiss you, I'll box the other side; or, what is better, I'll get somebody else to do it. (*Enter JOHN ROYLE and JOEL at back; JOHN comes down, R., JOEL, L.*) You're a sneak that blabs and tells tales; and you are the worst of sneaks, because you're spiteful to girls! (*to JOHN*) John Royle, you are my mother's servant, and as such you are bound to protect my mother's daughter. (*pointing to SILVERDALE*) That person has been rude to me. You are a big man, and know a lot of strong words—tell him what I think of him, do!

JOEL. (R.C.) Stop a bit. If there's goin' to be any blood spilt, the misus 'ud like to be in it, I know. (*goes off, up L.*)

JOHN (C) Been rude, has he? (*JOHN advances to SILVERDALE, looks him up and down, and then snatches his umbrella from him and flings it away*) So you have been rude, eh? (*snatches book from him and flings it away*) Been rude, have you?

SIL. (L.) Sir, at the present moment I am not prepared—I really am not—for a muscular encounter. Allow me to call your attention to the fact that you have cast away that young lady's prize for good conduct.

JOHN. (C., *raising his fist*) You reptile!

HES. (R., *laying her hand upon JOHN's arm*) Don't strike him. He has to sing tenor in the choir at Shrewsbury on the Sunday afternoons.

NANCE *enters, followed by JOEL, L.* NANCE *comes down, L.C.*

NANCE. Now then, what's the matter here?

JOHN. A cur is the matter here—a fellow that is rude to ladies, and who wants to be kicked out.

NANCE. If there's any kicking out of my place, I do it, so you fall back, John Royle. (*JOHN goes up to stable door, and leans on it*) Now then, schoolmaster, what's your tale? Out with it!

HES. (R.) Don't listen to him, mother, don't listen to him!

SIL. (L.C.) I will be listened to, because I [am here as a representative of truth and right. Mrs. Butterworth, I have some painful communications to make to you. Be seated. (*NANCE sits on stool, L., and HESTER on stool, R., SILVERDALE on basket, C., JOEL stands up, L.*) These communications relate to your daughter, who, I hope in passing, will continue her studies in geography—always her weak

point. Your daughter, I regret to say, Mrs. Butterworth, has not deserved well of the Academy for young ladies at Shrewsbury.

NANCE. (*sitting, L.*) What do I care for that? Let my child please me, and she does her duty. The school was my baby's servant, not her master, and was hired to wait on her.

SIL. (*sitting, C.*) Really; then of course we are reduced to the simple question—has the child done its duty to its mother?

HES. (*R., aside, to SILVERDALE*) Oh, have pity on me, please, Mr. Silverdale!

NANCE. (*L.*) Silence, Hester!

SIL. (*C.*) Your daughter, Hester (*whose English grammar, I may remark, will require careful watching*), has, I am pained to have to say, brought discredit upon her school.

NANCE. What! My child brought discredit—my child—

SIL. Pray hear me out. The real object of my visit I have hitherto concealed from you. I have travelled many weary miles to endeavour to persuade your daughter—who, I trust, by-the-bye, will continue her pianoforte practice—to persuade your daughter to confess everything to you. This she has refused to do; and, for the credit and fair name and fame of the Academy, I am compelled to reveal all.

HES. (*starting up*) He doesn't tell the truth, mother; don't listen to him.

NANCE. Silence, Hester! (*HESTER sits again*)

SIL. Mrs. Butterworth, when did your daughter arrive home?

NANCE. Within the last hour. You know that well enough, man.

SIL. And when did she quit our Academy?

NANCE. Yesterday.

SIL. Have you any proof of that?

NANCE. Proof! Against my child?

SIL. Yes, really. Proof.

NANCE. I've her own word—her letters written to me from Shrewsbury. The last came the day before yesterday. (*taking it from the bosom of her dress*) Here it is.

SIL. What does she say about leaving school? (*NANCE takes her spectacles out of her pocket, puts them on, and reads*)

NANCE. "I leave school on Tuesday morning, and shall—" (*huskily*) My glasses are dull, and I can't see through 'em. (*handing letter to SILVERDALE*) You read it.

SIL. Shall I, really? Certainly. Um! You must really watch her handwriting—too many flourishes. (*reading*) "I leave school on Tuesday morning, and shall be with you,

if everything is well, on Wednesday. How I long to see you, and my dear home ! All the joints here are so fat and underdone." So on. (*returning letter to NANCE*) Now, Mrs. Butterworth, I think I can open your eyes.

NANCE. Stop a bit, before you speak. Don't you say more nor less than the truth. I'm a bit soft-hearted about my baby. I am hard as the stones to everything else in the world ; and if you speak against her, I shall have to be hard to her, too. Be careful—(*laying her hand on her heart*)—or you'll hurt me.

SIL. You really pain me. Notwithstanding, I am compelled to tell you, dear Mrs. Butterworth, that Hester finally quitted the Academy more than six weeks ago.

NANCE. More than six weeks ago ! What has she been doing ? Where has she been since ?

SIL. Ah ! that is a little mystery, but I fancy——

HES. Mother, dear, I can tell you——

NANCE. Be silent ! (*to SILVERDALE*) Well, sir ?

SIL. I really fancy I can furnish a slight clue. On two occasions during the last eighteen months, I have met your daughter at a spot about three miles from the Academy, a place called the "Lime Trees," walking arm-in-arm with a young gentleman——

NANCE. The same man each time ?

SIL. The same person. I was not seen by them, and I kept the circumstance to myself.

NANCE. Was it your duty to the parent of a child to do that ?

SIL. I don't know, really. But I held my tongue for the good of the Academy, and for the sake of the young ladies, to whom I am attached.

NANCE. (*rising*) Hester !

HES. Mother, won't you listen to me ?

NANCE. Yes, when you answer my questions. Tell me, when did you leave your school ; the school that I've scraped my money together to pay for ?

HES. (*slowly*) Six weeks ago or a little more.

NANCE. And did the schoolmaster see you in the place called the Lime Trees, walking with a young gentleman ?

HES. Yes, mother, I dare say he did.

NANCE. You were walking with a young gentleman there ?

HES. Yes, mother, I was. (*SILVERDALE shrugs his shoulders, and crosses, R.*)

NANCE. (*to JOEL*) Joel !

JOEL. Ees, missus.

NANCE. Fetch the small tin box that stands under the window-seat in the parlour.

JOEL. Ees, missus. (*goes off, L.*)

HES. (*rising and going to NANCE*) What are you going to do, mother? (*crosses to NANCE*)

NANCE. I'm going to start you afresh in life, a long way from where I am or where I shall ever be. (*goes into L. corner*)

HES. No, no, mother, you mustn't send me away till I've told you everything. (*crossing to NANCE*) This fellow—(*pointing to SILVERDALE*)—is a sneak and a coward. He would have been a sweetheart of mine, but I've hated the sight of him, and I've told him so. I boxed his ears once in the playground before all the girls, and he owes me a grudge for it and wants to pay me out.

NANCE. (*coldly*) You can't say but what he has told the truth, and I don't want you near me any more.

HES. You don't know that I've done wrong.

NANCE. I know that you've deceived me, on your own showing. I know that you've told me lie upon lie. (*crosses, 3 c.*)

HES. (*L.C.*) Mother, if you'll let me kneel to you, as I used to do when I was a little girl, I'll tell you all my faults.

NANCE. (*C.*) I don't want to know 'em. I know that something has come between you and me; and whatever it is, it has robbed a child of its mother and a mother of her child, for you and I shall part this very day.

HES. I'll not leave you; I *will* be your baby, as I have always been. I came home to tell you everything; but I knew I had been wrong, and I was going to tell you slowly, a word a day, as it were, so that I shouldn't hurt you more than I could help. (*HESTER tries to embrace NANCE, who shakes her off, and crosses 3, to table, L.*)

NANCE. Ay, you came home to fool me, but you shan't do it. (*R., crosses L. to table. JOEL enters from L., carrying a small tin box. He comes down between HESTER and NANCE*)

JOEL. (*coming down, c., and giving box to NANCE*) Here's the box, missus. (*NANCE takes it and places it on table, L. She takes a bunch of keys from her pocket, and proceeds to open it*)

HES. (*seizing JOEL's arm*) Joel, I want to speak to you. (*she leads JOEL down, R., and speaks to him in an undertone.*)

SILVERDALE *crosses to NANCE*)

SIL. (*coming down to NANCE*) This is a most unfortunate affair, it really is. Er—um—need I wait?

NANCE. Aye, that you need. (*SILVERDALE goes up*) I'll have something to say to you by-and-bye.

HES. (*aside to JOEL*) Dear Joel, you've known me ever

since I was a little mite of a girl. Don't you remember, Joel? You used to nurse me.

JOEL. Ay, and mortal heavy you were.

HES. I'm heavier still now, Joel, especially about the heart. But you like me, don't you?

JOEL. Why, of course I do—you give me a kiss a little while back.

HES. And I'll give you another if you'll do me a service, dear Joel. Run, as fast as your legs can carry you, to old Mrs. Chorley's—you know, the little red cottage near the railway station, with the raven in a cage outside the door. Say that you come from me—Hester—and that you are to bring back an answer. (*taking BABY's shoe from the bosom of her dress, and kissing it*) Take this—she'll recognise it; and mind, bring back an answer. Will you run, Joel, for my sake?—for the sake of the child you have dandled on your knee?

JOEL. Ay, I'll run, Miss Hesty. I'll run till I well-nigh drop for a glass o' yale. (*he goes off hastily, up R.*)

NANCE. (*L., who has opened the box, and taken out of it a small old pocket-book and a little bag of money*) Hester!

HES. Yes, mother.

NANCE. Before we part, I want to give you this money; it's all I have, and I'm sorry it's so little. There are some bank-notes in the pocket-book, and a little gold and silver in the canvas bag. And now you can go. (*puts her hand in the tin box and takes out a little faded paper packet*) Look here, here's a ringlet of yours, cut off when you were a baby. (*thoughtfully*) My baby's hair. (*slight pause; sitting at table. The packet drops from her hand, and she sits on stool, L., and covers her face with her hands*)

HES. (C.) No, mother, I'll not take a penny of your money, for I don't want for means to keep me, or to help you. Mother—I'm—I'm married. (*NANCE looks up*)

NANCE. (*rises*) You're—you're married!

HES. I've been married more than a year (*NANCE sits again*), mother. It was very wrong, but I fell in love frightfully, and I knew you would never consent, and we both felt that we couldn't live without each other.

NANCE. Who is he?

HES. He's a gentleman, mother.

NANCE. (*with a short laugh*) Ha!

HES. But he has a small income, large enough to maintain us, and to defray any little incidental expense; and he's so good-looking and affectionate.

NANCE. (*clenching her hands*) I should like to have him near me now! What is he?

HES. He's—he's nothing. He was in the Civil Service.

NANCE. That's where he learnt his manners, I suppose.

HES. And he came down Shrewsbury way to fish.

NANCE. I'll be bound he did.

HES. And I chanced to be on the banks of the same stream, and in leaning over the water to see my face, I slipped, and put my foot in it.

NANCE. Ay, you've put your foot in it.

HES. And he would insist on my taking off my wet shoe and he would dry it with his pocket handkerchief; and he would make me wear his big, clumsy boot all the way home; and then we laughed because it was so funny, and—oh, dear, it might have happened to anybody! (*goes out, L.C.*)

SIL. (*at back, leaning on the pump*) Miss Butterworth.

HES. That's not my name, and you've just heard me say so.

SIL. Pardon me, but where's your wedding-ring? (*HESTER looks at her left hand*)

NANCE. What do you mean?

SIL. I see Miss Butterworth doesn't wear a wedding-ring; but I suppose it's all right.

NANCE. Where's your wedding-ring?

HES. (*dismayed*) I—I've lost it.

NANCE. Lost it!

SIL. Oh, dear! oh, dear! that's really very singular. (*JOHN comes down, R.C., holding the ring in his hand*)

JOHN. Here it is. You threw it to me into the stable, and I caught it.

HES. (*running to him*) Ah, Jack, dear!

JOHN. (*putting his arms round her*) My darling Hester! (*NANCE starts up*)

SIL. Good gracious me!

NANCE. What?

HES. (*taking JOHN's hand*) This, mother, dear—this is the gentleman I have married. John Royle is my husband.

SIL. (*aside*) I thought I recognised the man's face. That's the fellow I saw under the lime trees at Shrewsbury.

JOHN. Yes, Mrs. Butterworth, I am to blame for everything, believe me. My only excuse is, that I am a good husband, and shall always remain one. (*putting wedding-ring on HESTER's finger*) There's your wedding-ring, Hester; never take it from your hand again, dear.

NANCE. What have you come here for, to triumph over me?

JOHN. Oh! don't think that; when the time arrived for my wife to return home, I came to you that you might get

accustomed to the sight of me, and, perhaps, find out that I am not the worst fellow in the world. It was Hester's plan, and I hope it has not altogether failed. (*crosses to NANCE*) Come, mother, look on the bright side of things. You shall not lose your daughter, and, such as I am, you shall gain me; I'll work honestly for you, and I'll put my money into your land, and make Butterworth's farm a model for the county.

NANCE. Nay, John Royle, if I wouldn't give my daughter to you, you may be sure I won't sell her. (JOHN, R.C., *crosses* L.C., NANCE *sits*) Our paths lie wide apart.

JOEL *enters at back, R., carrying an infant. He comes down, R.*

JOEL. Here you are, Miss Hesty, I've brought the answer. (HESTER *snatches the baby from him, and kisses it*)

HES. (*timidly to NANCE, gradually going to her*) Mother, John and I have got a baby. It is four weeks old, and is so intelligent. He's a boy, mother, and we are going to make him a farmer. (*coming to NANCE*) Will you look at him before we leave you? Just one little look—mother, mother! (*she kneels, and places the child on NANCE's lap*)

SIL. (*aside, at back*) Um! The young lady has accounted to me for the interval of six weeks. I really think that I can be of no further use, so I'll go quietly. (*he goes off at back, R., unobserved. NANCE looks at the baby, and then kisses it*)

NANCE. (*fondly*) Eh, he's a fine boy! (HESTER *kneels down by NANCE's side, and the two women rock the baby, and kiss it alternately*)

HES. He's so good, too, mother. He never cries—at least, very seldom. See my dimple in his chin, mother!

NANCE. (*looking at HESTER*) Ay! he's got your eyes, too, baby. But I'm doubtful about his nose.

HES. (*rising*) It's John's nose—isn't it, John? (JOHN *rubs his nose*) Mother, dear, if we are to go, will you give baby back to me, that we may take him away? (*holding out her arms*)

NANCE. (*hugging the baby*) Nay, I can't give him up. I'm hard, and cruel, and sour; but I can't let my baby's baby go!

HES. (*putting her arm round NANCE's neck, on her L.*) Then are we to stay, mother?

NANCE. Ay, John and you. Where's that schoolmaster chap? (JOHN and JOEL *look round for SILVERDALE*)

JOHN. Why, he's gone! (*goes up stage, and looks, L.*)

JOEL. (*who has been sitting, R.*) Oh, he saw the look in my eye, and he sneaked off. (*music*)

NANCE. Well, better to go quietly. We'll think of him as an ugly dream, a nightmare, that we wake up in the morning to forget. Hester, do you forgive me?

HES. Of course, mother. (*goes to her*)

NANCE. John! (*JOHN comes to her, on her R. ; to JOHN*) Do you forgive me?

JOHN. (*bending down and kissing her*) Of course, mother.

NANCE. No more mystery, children.

JOHN. }
HES. } No.

NANCE. Then I'm a disagreeable, cross-grained, happy old woman! But when this baby grows up to be a man he shall never guess what I have been, for I'll make him believe that I'm the kindest, lovingest, best grandmother in the world.

THE CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY.

JOHN.

JOEL.

NANCE AND BABY.

HESTER.

THE END.

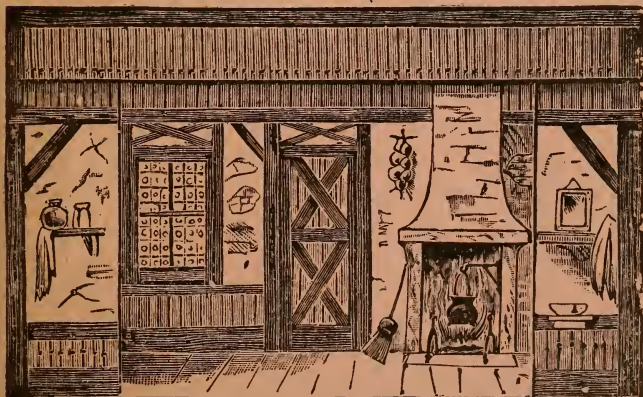
DRAWING ROOM.



Only kept in the large size, the back scene is 13 feet long and 9 feet high and extends with the Wings and Borders to 20 feet long and 11½ feet high. In the centre is a French window, leading down to the ground, On the left wing is a fireplace with mirror above, and on the right wing is an oil painting. The whole scene is tastefully ornamented and beautifully coloured, forming a most elegant picture. The above is a representation of a box scene consisting of 38 sheets of paper, the extra sheets being used for the doors each side.

| | | £ | s. | d. |
|---|-------|---|----|----|
| Back Scene, Border, and 1 Set of Wings, unmounted | | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Ditto, mounted | | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Back Scene, Border, with 2 Sets of Wings as above to form Box | | | | |
| Scene, unmounted | | 2 | 10 | 0 |
| Ditto, mounted | | 5 | 5 | 0 |

COTTAGE.



This is also kept in the large size only. In the centre is a door leading outside. On the left centre is a rustic fireplace, and the right centre is a window. On the Wings are painted shelves, &c., to complete the scene. The above is a representation of this scene with 1 set of Wings only (not a Box Scene), but a Box Scene can be made by purchasing the extra set of Wings. Prices and size same as Drawing Room Scene above.

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